

**Lesson Overview**

The ICS Overview lesson introduces you to:

- The background and development of ICS.
- ICS as the standard for emergency management across the country.
- ICS as interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible.
- Applications of ICS.

**The Incident Command System (ICS)**

An incident is an occurrence, either caused by humans or natural phenomena, that requires action by emergency service personnel to prevent or minimize loss of life or damage to property and/or the environment.

Examples of incidents include:

- Fire, both structural and wildfire.
- Hazardous materials incidents.
- Search and rescue missions.
- Oil spills.
- Natural disasters.
- Terrorist/WMD events.
- Planned events, such as parades or political rallies, just to name a few.

Because of today's budget constraints and limited staffing of local, State, and Federal agencies, it's not possible for any one agency to handle all the management and resource needs for the increasing numbers of incidents nationwide. Local, State, and Federal agencies must work together in a smooth, coordinated effort under the same management system.

The Incident Command System, or ICS, is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries.

ICS has considerable internal flexibility. It can grow or shrink to meet different needs. This flexibility makes it a very cost effective and efficient management approach for both small and large situations.

**History of the Incident Command System (ICS)**

The Incident Command System (ICS) was developed in the 1970s following a series of catastrophic fires in California's urban interface. Property damage ran into the millions, and many people died or were injured. The personnel assigned to determine the causes of this disaster studied the case histories and discovered that response problems could rarely be attributed to lack of resources or failure of tactics. What were the lessons learned?

Surprisingly, studies found that response problems were far more likely to result from inadequate management than from any other single reason.

Weaknesses in incident management were often due to:

- Lack of personnel accountability, including unclear chains of command and supervision.
- Poor communication due to both inefficient uses of available communications systems and conflicting codes and terminology.
- Lack of an orderly, systematic planning process.
- No common, flexible, predesigned management structure that enables commanders to delegate responsibilities and manage workloads efficiently.
- No predefined methods to integrate interagency requirements into the management structure and planning process effectively.

A poorly managed incident response can be devastating to our economy, the food supply, and our health and safety. With so much at stake, we must effectively manage our response efforts. The Incident Command System, or ICS, allows us to do so. ICS is a proven management system based on successful business practices. This course introduces you to ICS and the vital role that you can play.

**ICS Built on Best Practices**

ICS is:

- A proven management system based on successful business practices.
- The result of decades of lessons learned in the organization and management of emergency incidents.

This system represents organizational "best practices," and has become the standard for emergency management across the country.

**What ICS Is Designed To Do**

Designers of the system recognized early that ICS must be interdisciplinary and organizationally flexible to meet the following management challenges:

- Meet the needs of incidents of any kind or size.
- Be usable for routine or planned events such as conferences, as well as large and complex emergency incidents.
- Allow personnel from a variety of agencies to meld rapidly into a common management structure.
- Provide logistical and administrative support to operational staff.
- Be cost effective by avoiding duplication of efforts.

ICS has been tested in more than 30 years of emergency and non-emergency applications, by all levels of government and in the private sector.

**Applications for the Use of ICS**

Applications for the use of ICS have included:

- Routine or planned events (e.g., celebrations, parades, and concerts).
- Fires, hazardous materials, and multicasualty incidents.
- Multijurisdiction and multiagency disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and winter storms.
- Search and rescue missions.
- Biological pest eradication programs.
- Biological outbreaks and disease containment.
- Acts of terrorism.

**ICS Features**

In this course, you will learn about the following ICS features:

- ICS Organization
- Incident Facilities
- Incident Action Plan
- Span of Control
- Common Responsibilities